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"THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US UP THE  
HUMAN WAY."

I. "SOMETHING TO DO—WORK."

A SERMON  
BY  
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"SOMETHING TO DO—WORK."

Being the first in a series of three sermons, on  
"THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US UP THE  
HUMAN WAY."

I "SOMETHING TO DO—WORK."

II "SOMETHING TO THINK."

III "SOME PLACE APART—PRIVACY."

## "THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US UP THE HUMAN WAY."

### I. "SOMETHING TO DO—WORK."

**W**E close the church year in a mood ungirded and relaxed. Let duties sit lightly and the voice of the taskmaster be a gentle voice. We begin the year in the girded-up, the bent-bow, and the taut string frame of mind.

As we go over the record of what men have believed and done before now there emerge some things which we think were effective in helping them up the human way. Of some of these we have thought it might be helpful to speak. If we draw upon the old experience of men, this needs no apology. It is by necessity that we go to the past, for the past is all that we know. We do travel forward but we have to learn backward. The future may be brilliant and have in it much that we ought to have now. It may have much of priceless wisdom for us could we but have it now, but, what is ahead is veiled. It is by the necessity of our limitations that we trace the way that men have come until now, with some

confidence that what has helped them to this point will be of service still as they go on from here.

The world is full of voices now, strident and confident, urging new ways of building human life. They counsel that the helps which have made men before are now wholly superseded and may safely be discarded for they will never be needed again. They have a great advantage. All who deal only in futures; all who deal only in what is going to be tomorrow; always have this great advantage: no one can contradict them. Our venture is more modest and less prophetic. We are dealing with things that have helped men up the human way. We are restating them in the confidence that they still hold their long-tried worth.

There is a phrase we meet with often which always interests us very much. It is the sentiment that we must work less in order that we may live more, with the implication that the human race will bound into its heritage about in proportion as this work necessity is relieved. We get the impression that a man does not begin to live, and the processes of life do not begin to function, until he quits work. Then, they start up and he continues to live until that hour when by the necessities of an evil world he must go to work again. We are always interested in this sentiment which we meet now, it seems to us, with increasing frequency.

Perhaps it seems strange to us because our American traditions come from another sentiment so different from this. It has been said recently that we cannot go on forever feeding Bohemia on the traditions of the Mayflower. Perhaps we cannot. Perhaps it would be to our national profit if we could. This still is in the laps of the gods, which traditions are better, our first traditions, or this later alien sentiment. Whether they are right or not; whether it is just an old notion, and Victorian, the Puritans were a strenuously working folk. Historians say that perhaps few people in history have performed greater labor in a given time than they. They did not spend much time in whining about human oppression and the misery of their lot, but labored on in the spirit that it is a human necessity and a part of the great will of their sovereign God. Living was working and working was living, and they worked about all the time except Sunday, and that was the Lord's, and they would neither work nor play on His time. What we wish to bring out is that, whether they were right or wrong about it, to live was to work and to work was to live. This got into our national traditions and into our blood. They had a feeling of distrust for waking hours not fully employed; thought they did not make for profit and for what they expressed by godliness. Getting through work and cutting it down, so that they could really live—they would not have understood this.



As we go on we find that early men and early religions often got the blessings and the curses sadly mixed. Often we have to reverse their judgment, and, in Socrates' good phrase, make their worse appear the better part. Men are born; later they die; in between they labor. All three of these, birth, labor and death, quite early got connotations of ill-repute. All three of these got listed as grit in the world's machinery and named with the evil and the dark. Each of them is as it is, they said, because something went wrong, which if God could have prevented he did not. It is only with great effort that free minds of this century shake themselves free from this intellectual heritage that all three of these, birth, labor and death, are God's regret and evil's triumph.

We do not think for a moment that those in our modern world who use the phrase most, "Reduce work so that we can have time to live more," are much influenced by these early religious beliefs. On the contrary they are often those most completely divorced from both religion's truths and religion's errors. All we are noting is that with all their modernness they are clinging to a conception of work as grit in the world's machinery. We are saying that this is not historical nor scientific, which is saying it is not true, and what is not true is not desirable.

The words in our various languages to express what we name in English when we say "Work," all bear witness to this that we have stated, that they got their blessings and their curses mixed. Work was listed with the grit and the sad necessity of the world order. In the Hebrew it means pain; in the Greek, I strive, I suffer; and in the Latin, pain. In the Italian and the French this idea of pain and travail is carried over. The suggestion in Genesis, that work is something penal imposed for disobedience, is common in the legends generally of all early people. We come by it naturally in our intellectual inheritance that work is a misfortune and the languages of the world memorialize the fallacy.

Now we turn to other witnesses, to those who study facts and not legends; to things as they are and the things that have made us. What do the scientists say about work, those who are concerned neither with the dogmas of religion nor the dogmas of economic propaganda? They say it is true that primitive men are averse to sustained labor. It is to them an evil necessity, and that is why they made a religion in which work is a great evil, and dreamed of a heaven of unrelieved unemployment. Children recapitulating the early experiences of the race think the same, and work to them is often a shadow on the face of the world. A workless world is their dream of a perfect world, without tasks or school. Primitive men worked spasmodically and under necessity.

They waited until supplies were low; until they felt the urge of hunger and of winter before they moved. Sustained labor to put them far ahead of today's needs; stored up fruits of their labor, this triumph of modern man—they did not do it. They did not want to do it. They had not the mind or the will to do it. It is a late acquisition of a rising race. To the scientist this reluctance to work in adults is atavism, a reversion, going back to an ancestral trait. It is the breaking out in the descendant of some disease or weakness of long ago forbears. The scientists inform us that when criminals, prostitutes and vagabonds do exert themselves and labor, it is in this primitive, atavistic fashion. They say that this mood for sustained labor; the desire for it and the ability to keep to it, are the high accomplishments of civilization, marking race adulthood. It is an acquisition, an accomplishment, something earned in honor rather than the brand of disgrace for something lost. Chronic indisposition to labor belongs chronologically back with the three-toed horse and the dodo. We sometimes talk of a chronic leisure class as the flower of the human struggle. It seems that it is not. The chronic leisure class is not the peak of the human pyramid but its base. That is the condition from which we all have come. It is the place we are getting away from, not the place to which we are going. The leisure class numerically is not among the people nor in the part of the city we have in mind popularly when we say, leisure class. It is



in the parts in which work is done only at intervals under compulsion, in the primitive fashion, with the women doing that necessary labor if they will.

We are thinking to-day of work as a factor historically in civilizing and humanizing men. We are looking at the evidence of what it has done in taming men; in giving self-control; in modifying the human disposition until it is companionable for association and for co-operative enterprises. We have not heard so much of this. We are more familiar with the brutalizing, dehumanizing effects of work, keeping men down as beasts of burden. We do get the impression from many voices that exemption from work will lift men into the great inheritance of earth and into their long denied liberty as children of God. We are familiar with Carlyle's "Conscript Brother." "For us was thy back so bent; for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed. Thou wert our conscript upon whom the lot fell and fighting our battles wert so marred." We are familiar with this and with, "The man with the hoe, bowed by the weight of centuries."

There is another effect which is quite as true if not quite as moving for essays and poetry. Work has at times and in places, unmade men, but back of this, far back of this, is a long process of making men by the work that they do, whether from necessity or imposed by a taskmaster. In that long journey from wild men, with uncontrolled impulses, to

fairly gentle men who are self-controlled, work has been one of the great helps. Those who study the human race say that the habit of regular and methodical work has destroyed the violent impulses of man's primitive character. Work by subduing man and by tiring him out, furnished the first basis of self-control which is the first condition of all morality. The uniformity and regularity of work among civilized nations are among the greatest triumphs in the evolution of the race. Says one, "I am almost tempted to say that the habit of work is the most striking phenomenon in human history." What work has done to the earth surface; the ground that it has cleared; the fields it has planted and all that the world about us today is that is different from a state of nature, all this has helped make men, but this is another subject.

We are thinking of what work as a necessity, or an acquired habit, has done to man himself. What directors of gymnasiums and all who plan strenuous physical activities for youth and adults, what they mean this to do for people, work has done for the human race. It uses up that surging, surplus physical vitality in a way that gives not only weariness of body but content of mind and saves it going out some other way, bad for the life itself and all others. This is just what work has done for the race, which through hard physical labor worked off some of its animal fierceness; got tired; kept this bounding physical

exuberance in hand. With the animal vigor subdued by being used and spent in things that had to be done, they sat down. Men once were about all animal vigor. They had but little else. Animal vigor is good but it alone never makes what we call a man and it never makes civilization. Work brought weariness and weariness demanded a place to rest. Out of this need came the camp-fire which grew into the family circle. This demanded protection. Protection demanded some kind of code of conduct and moral order.

It is theoretically possible that a high race of men might have been developed in some other way, but we have no such example. This earth is the only place we have seen men made. Work has been a constant factor in making people here. Men have come up to most in the temperate zone. The temperate zone has been the work zone. Men had the least necessity put upon them in the tropics for sustained labor and there human nature is least subdued and controlled. There it is fiercest and most primitive, which is to say, wildest. In the temperate zone, where men have themselves most in hand; have the best code and have done the most, labor is a necessity. Men have to work a part of the year or freeze and starve the remainder of the year. This necessity has done much to the world and it has done much for the nature of man. They are about the only men who have made a moral code and can

keep themselves within it sufficiently to have an ordered government today, or to have self-government. Not only has the necessity of work made men ordered, self-controlled and content in the past, but it is doing so now.

Whatever work may be required for production, we do not go into in this connection. Work as a factor in making and maintaining our manhood we do go into. It is only a small number at any place or time who have ever been able to keep themselves in form without it. It has not only a producing value but also a moral, ordering, civilizing, humanizing value. This concerns us even more as a people now than does work as an instrument of production.

There is a whining, sobbing, rebellious note in all our consideration of work today. Keep this for all the evils associated with work. Let the whining and rebellion be directed against all work that is too burdensome; against all places that are not fit; against all periods that are too long; against all inequities in sharing the products of work. These are legitimate marks against which to direct all whining and rebellion, but, against work itself, and the necessity of it, let us save our sympathy for worthier causes. That men have to go to their labor, to the kind which they can do and have learned to do; that they have to go regularly in the morning and that they get tired and come home glad to rest, this

is not a matter for sympathy but for congratulation and thanksgiving. This is not theory. This is human experience which anyone can try out for himself and know that this witness is true. It is a necessity, a hard necessity, but through it not only is the fabric of the world being maintained, but also the fabric of their own manhood is being maintained.

Someone has said that God might have given us some greater gift than work to keep us ordered and content, but he has not. We are saying that this is not just a Victorian sentiment, or just preaching, but that it is historically and scientifically true, four-square with the facts of the old experience of men and with your experience and mine today.







